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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000381

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2014

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KISL IS JO

SUBJECT: ISLAMISTS WEIGH IN AGAINST THE U.S., ISRAEL AND FRANCE

REF: A. AMMAN 00304

1B. 03 AMMAN 08225

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for Reasons 1.5 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), have recently joined a charge against reform of the state educational curriculum and spearheaded a new drive in Parliament to sever relations with Israel. The Islamists also denounced the French government for its decision to ban headscarves in state schools. Israeli politicians' rhetoric about the displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank, which raises the specter of another wave of refugees coming to Jordan, has contributed to a public mood of paranoia about Israeli motives and receptivity to Islamist tub-thumping. End Summary.

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"EXTREMIST" AMERICA  
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2. (U) On January 7, secretary general of the IAF Hamzah Mansour gave an interview on Al-Arabiya television via satellite from Amman. When asked about the IAF's opposition to the inclusion of new human rights materials in Jordan's educational curriculum (see ref a), Mansour stated that the proposed changes were intended "to present our pupils with an Islam that is tailored to suit the specifications of Sharon and Bush, and not Almighty God." Mansour rejected the idea that the current curriculum supported extremism and instead claimed "it is the U.S. administration and its lackey Blair who is the inventor, leader and sponsor of extremism."

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NO PEACE IN OUR TIME  
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3. (U) During his interview, Mansour also condemned the Jordan-Israel peace agreement, claiming that it was a "treaty of subjugation" that was "imposed on our people." He asked rhetorically, "What kind of peace can be made with those who expelled five million Palestinians from their land and replaced them with five million bastards brought in from all corners of the world?"

4. (U) In addition to such statements of condemnation of Jordan-Israel relations, the IAF rounded up 41 MPs (roughly 37% of the 110-seat Chamber of Deputies) to endorse a memorandum demanding that the GOJ sever ties with Israel and expel the Israeli ambassador. It also requested that an expected visit to Jordan by Israeli FM Silvan Shalom later this month be canceled. "The government should consider the Israeli ambassador persona non grata and halt all dealings with the Jewish entity," read the memo.

5. (C) While the IAF-generated memo reflects long-standing anger at Israel for its treatment of Palestinians, its endorsement by mainstream MPs was in direct reaction to a recent proposal by hard-liners in the Israeli Likud party central committee that recommended the transfer of Palestinians to a third country in the region. The GOJ was quick to rebuff the proposal, with Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez stating on January 11 that Jordan "rejects any Israeli schemes which seek to expel Palestinians or to return to statements that Jordan is a substitute homeland (for Palestinians)." King Abdullah also publicly rejected the proposal, highlighting the issue's importance to Jordanians.

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HEADSCARF MANIA  
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6. (U) Mansour also directed his ire at the French decision to prohibit women from wearing Islamic headscarves in state schools. He claimed that the French President "wants to take away the robe of chastity from the Muslim woman and he wants to defame her image." Mansour also warned that the ban marked "the beginning of a new era of more restrictions on Muslims in France and afterward throughout Europe and elsewhere in countries around the world."

17. (U) To further express condemnation of the French decision, female members of the IAF launched a petition campaign in Jordan calling on France to rescind its headscarf ban. As of January 12, 30,000 signatures had been collected. IAF MP Hayat Al-Maseemi (West Banker, Zarqa - 1st District) said the campaign was "a show of solidarity with Muslim women in France and the world," and she questioned why France considered headscarves "a threat to secularism, while regarding revealing attire as part of public freedoms."

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) What is noteworthy here is that IAF calls to sever relations with Israel may be finding increased resonance among Jordanians as the Palestinian-Israeli stalemate drags on and as some in the Israeli right-wing look to Jordan as a solution. The fact that 24 mainstream MPs joined the 17 IAF MPs shows popular frustration with Israeli policies. It also highlights the extreme sensitivity, bordering on paranoia, that Jordanians and the GOJ feel at even the hint of an Israeli transfer of Palestinians to Jordan.

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